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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (GORKOWSKI)

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SUBJECT: SNAPSHOT OF A KYRGYZ RESORT TOWN

REF: BISHKEK 1094

¶1. (U) Summary: During a stop in Cholpon Ata, the main tourist town on Lake Issyk Kul's northern shore, the Ambassador visited the Ruh Ordo religious park and the local petroglyphs. Accommodations in the region range from Soviet-era relics to modern (and pricey) developments, which attract Kyrgyz and Kazakh tourists during the short summer season for lakeside vacations. The region suffers from a more predictable schedule of power outages than in Bishkek. American actor Mark Dacascos made an appearance in Cholpon Ata during the Ambassador's stay. End summary.

Parks and Petroglyphs

¶2. (U) The Ambassador visited Cholpon Ata, the main tourist town on Lake Issyk Kul's northern shore, during her October 22-24 visit to Issyk Kul oblast. Cholpon Ata is a small town of about 8,000 year-round residents that hosts tens of thousands of mostly Kyrgyz and Kazakh tourists during the summer season. In addition to the chilly waters of the lake, Cholpon Ata features two prominent attractions: the Ruh Ordo religious park and ancient petroglyphs. The Ruh Ordo park encompasses buildings dedicated to several faiths, including Islam, Judaism, Eastern Orthodoxy (dedicated by Anastasia Yeltsin, the late President Boris Yeltsin's wife and graced with a statue of Boris Yeltsin), Protestantism, and Catholicism, juxtaposed amongst statues of Greek and Roman gods, and all located on a large plot of prime lakeside land. The park neighbors President Bakiyev's lakeside retreat, and provides a view of Bakiyev's schooner, the Moskva. The petroglyphs, which are situated above the town, have largely weathered away and apparently were damaged during a German-financed preservation project.

Range of Accommodations

¶3. (U) From Soviet-era relics to modern bungalows, the Cholpon Ata area hosts a hodgepodge of accommodations. The flagship Aurora complex provides a disappointing array of services and facilities reminiscent of its Soviet heyday, while more modern and upscale developments such as Karven Four Seasons offer apartments for sale starting at \$200,000. Despite daily rates of \$200-\$300 a night in the summer season, many Kyrgyz and tourists from neighboring countries find the financial resources to spend several days lakeside.

Lights, Cameras, Phones, Action?

¶4. (U) Rolling power cuts are more predictable in the Cholpon Ata area than in Bishkek. Hotel staff informed the Ambassador of the power cut schedule, but failed to note that cell phone service would also be disabled during the power outage. (Note: Some cell phone providers have used batteries

or generators at their cellular towers during power outages, but the extended nature of the power cuts has made such back-up systems extremely costly to maintain. End note.) While in Cholpon Ata, the Ambassador learned that the Issyk Kul Film Festival had attracted American actor Mark Dacascos. Local government officials expressed delight at Dacascos's presence, who is known here for his appearance in Central Asian period films.

Comment

15. (SBU) Issyk Kul oblast officials have told the Ambassador of their hopes to increase investment in the tourism sector and attract more "wealthy tourists" (reftel), and Cholpon Ata, the largest town on Issyk Kul's 200-kilometer northern shore, will likely be central to those efforts.
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